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6 **UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT**
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8 **SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

9 JESUS ROMERO, a Minor, by and
10 through his Guardian ad Litem,
11 MERIDA RAMOS,

12 Plaintiffs,

13 v.

14 S. SCHWAB COMPANY, INC.; RL
15 CHILDRENSWEAR COMPANY,
16 LLC; SYLVIA COMPANY, LLC;
17 CUNY ASSOCIATES, LLC; AND LM
SERVICES LLC.

18 Defendants.
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) Case No. 15-CV-815-GPC-MDD

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) **TENTATIVE ORDER:**

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) **1) GRANTING IN PART AND**

) **DENYING IN PART**

) **PLAINTIFF'S MOTION TO**

) **EXCLUDE EXPERT TESTIMONY**

) **OF DR. DAVID HOWITT, [Dkt.**

) **No. 152];**

)

) **2) GRANTING IN PART AND**

) **DENYING IN PART**

) **DEFENDANTS' MOTION TO**

) **EXCLUDE EXPERT**

) **TESTIMONIES OF DR. DAVID**

) **HALL, [Dkt. No. 148], AND DR.**

) **MICHEL BRONES, [Dkt. No. 147];**

)

) **3) DENYING DEFENDANTS'**

) **MOTION TO EXCLUDE EXPERT**

) **TESTIMONIES OF DR. DAVID**

) **XU, AND ANDREW ELLISON,**

) **[Dkt. Nos. 149, 156.]**

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1 Before the Court are Plaintiff's fully briefed motion to exclude the expert
2 testimony of Dr. David Howitt, (Dkt. Nos. 152, 172, 178), and Defendants'¹ fully
3 briefed motions to exclude the expert testimonies of Dr. Michel Brones, (Dkt. Nos.
4 147, 165, 175), Dr. David Hall, (Dkt. Nos. 148, 168, 176), Dr. David Xu, (Dkt. Nos.
5 149, 167, 177), and Andrew Ellison, (Dkt. Nos. 156, 164 179).

6 After a review of the briefs, supporting documentation and the applicable
7 law, the Court issues the following tentative ruling in advance of Friday's hearing
8 and GRANTS in part and DENIES in part Plaintiff's motion to exclude the expert
9 testimony of Dr. David Howitt. The Court GRANTS in part and DENIES in part
10 Defendants' motion to exclude the expert testimonies of Dr. David Hall, and Dr.
11 Michel Brones. The Court further DENIES Defendants' motion to exclude the
12 expert testimonies of Dr. David Xu, and Andrew Ellison.

13 **Background²**

14 On January 30, 2005, Plaintiff Jesus Romero and his family were planning an
15 outing to Rosarito, Mexico. Jesus, who was seven years old, and his younger
16 brother, Marcos, who was six years old, were dressed and ready, and went next door
17 to a neighbor's house to use a lighter. Both were sitting down and while Jesus held
18 a flower or green weed, Marcos lit the flower or weed with the lighter. Jesus
19 testified that he let go of the flower or weed because his fingers got hot and the lit
20 flower or weed landed on his shirt near his stomach. Jesus told his brother to go get
21 help so Marcos ran into the house and their father came out, ripped the shirt off,
22 dropped it to the concrete and stepped on it to extinguish the flames. Jesus suffered
23 second and third degree burns covering about 25% of his body. (Dkt. No. 128, Am.
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26 ¹ Defendants include S. Schwab Company, Inc.; RL Childrenswear Company, LLC; Sylvia
27 Company, LLC; CUNY Associates, LLC; and LM Services, LLC (collectively Defendants" or
28 "Schwab Defendants").

²The facts are taken from the Court's order on Schwab Defendants' motion for summary
judgment. (Dkt. No. 99.)

1 PTO at 5³.)

2 On the day of the incident, Jesus was wearing a boy's short-sleeved Ralph
3 Lauren red-and-white gingham button-down dress shirt ("Shirt"). Jesus' mother
4 Merida, only bought 100% cotton clothing for her family and would not have
5 purchased the Shirt if it had not been labeled 100% cotton.

6 Jesus alleges that 1) Defendants manufactured the shirt; and 2) although the
7 Shirt was labeled 100% cotton, it was not; instead, it was composed of a "highly
8 flammable, dangerous, and unlawful blend" of 90% cotton, 5% rayon, and 5% nylon
9 causing Jesus more severe burns than he would have suffered if the shirt had been
10 100% cotton. Plaintiff alleges causes of action for strict product liability for
11 manufacturing defect; negligence; breach of warranty; and negligent
12 misrepresentation against Defendants. (Dkt. No. 17, FAC; Dkt. No. 128, Am.
13 PTO.) Defendants contend that they did not manufacture the Shirt, the Shirt was
14 labeled correctly and made out of 100% cotton, and they are not liable for Jesus'
15 injuries.

16 Discussion

17 A. Daubert Legal Standard

18 The trial judge must act as the gatekeeper for expert testimony by carefully
19 applying Federal Rule of Evidence ("Rule") 702 to ensure specialized and technical
20 evidence is "not only relevant, but reliable." Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharms. Inc.,
21 509 U.S. 579, 589 & n.7 (1993); accord Kumho Tire Co. Ltd. v. Carmichael, 526
22 U.S. 137, 147 (1999) (Daubert imposed a special "gatekeeping obligation" on trial
23 judges).

24 Under Rule 702, a witness, "qualified as an expert by knowledge, skill,
25 experience, training, or education, may testify" . . . if "a) the expert's scientific,
26 technical, or other specialized knowledge will help the trier of fact to understand the

27 ³ Page numbers are based on the CM/ECF pagination.
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1 evidence or to determine a fact in issue; (b) the testimony is based on sufficient
2 facts or data; (c) the testimony is the product of reliable principles and methods; and
3 (d) the expert has reliably applied the principles and methods to the facts of the
4 case.” Fed. R. Evid. 702. The proponent of the evidence bears the burden of
5 proving the expert’s testimony satisfies Rule 702. Lust By & Through Lust v.
6 Merrell Dow Pharm., Inc., 89 F.3d 594, 598 (9th Cir. 1996).

7 In applying Rule 702, the Ninth Circuit “contemplates a broad conception of
8 expert qualifications.” Hangerter v. Provident Life & Accident Ins. Co., 373 F.3d
9 998, 1015 (9th Cir. 2004) (quoting Thomas v. Newton Int’l Enters., 42 F.3d 1266,
10 1269 (9th Cir. 1994)). “Shaky but admissible evidence is to be attacked by cross
11 examination, contrary evidence, and attention to the burden of proof, not
12 exclusion.” Primiano v. Cook, 598 F.3d 558, 564 (9th Cir. 2010) (citing Daubert,
13 509 U.S.at 596).

14 On the other hand, the district court must act as a gatekeeper to exclude “junk
15 science.” Messick v. Novartis Pharms. Corp., 747 F.3d 1193, 1199 (9th Cir. 2014);
16 Ellis v. Costco Wholesale Corp., 657 F.3d 970, 982 (9th Cir. 2011) (“Under
17 Daubert, the trial court must act as a “gatekeeper” to exclude junk science that does
18 not meet Federal Rule of Evidence 702’s reliability standards by making a
19 preliminary determination that the expert’s testimony is reliable.”).

20 Under Daubert, scientific evidence must be both reliable and relevant.
21 Daubert, 509 U.S. at 590-91. Scientific evidence is reliable “if the principles and
22 methodology used by an expert are grounded in the methods of science.” Clausen
23 v. M/V New Carissa, 339 F.3d 1049, 1056 (9th Cir. 2003). The focus of the district
24 court’s analysis “must be solely on principles and methodology, not on the
25 conclusions that they generate.” Daubert, 509 U.S. at 595. “[T]he test under
26 Daubert is not the correctness of the expert’s conclusions but the soundness of his
27 methodology.” Daubert v. Merrell Dow Pharms., Inc., 43 F.3d 1311, 1318 (9th Cir.
28 1995) (“Daubert II”). Second, the proposed expert testimony must be “relevant to

1 the task at hand,” meaning that it “logically advances a material aspect of the
2 proposing party’s case.” Daubert, 509 U.S. at 597.

3 As one Ninth Circuit court simply stated, the test is “whether or not the
4 reasoning is scientific and will assist the jury. If it satisfies these two requirements,
5 then it is a matter for the finder of fact to decide what weight to accord the expert’s
6 testimony.” Kennedy v. Collagen Corp., 161 F.3d 1226, 1231 (9th Cir. 1998).
7 “Disputes as to the strength of [an expert’s] credentials, faults in his use of [a
8 particular] methodology, or lack of textual authority for his opinion, go to the
9 weight, not the admissibility, of his testimony.” Id. (quoting McCulloch v. H.B.
10 Fuller Co., 61 F.3d 1038, 1044 (2d Cir. 1995)).

11 As an initial matter, the Court notes that both parties use many of the same
12 arguments to challenge each other’s expert testimonies. Many of the parties’
13 arguments challenge how the recognized methodology in the industry was used by
14 each expert and his interpretation. These disputes challenge the conclusions of the
15 experts, and not the reliability of the expert’s testing method. As one recent Ninth
16 Circuit court noted, “[w]here, as here, the experts’ opinions are not the “junk
17 science” Rule 702 was meant to exclude . . . the interests of justice favor leaving
18 difficult issues in the hands of the jury and relying on the safeguards of the
19 adversary system-‘[v]igorous cross-examination, presentation of contrary evidence,
20 and careful instruction on the burden of proof’- to ‘attack[] shaky but admissible
21 evidence’” Wendell v. GlaxoSmithKline LLC, 858 F.3d 1227, 1237 (9th Cir.
22 2017) (internal citations omitted).

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1 **B. Plaintiff’s Motion to Exclude Expert Testimony of Dr. David G. Howitt⁴**

2 David G. Howitt, Ph.D. (“Dr. Howitt”) is Defendants’ designated expert to
3 testify about the materials and fibers in the Shirt; the methodology for identifying
4 and distinguishing fabrics; the ignition, flammability and combustion of various
5 fabrics; and the flammability standards for garments. (Dkt. No. 128, Am. PTO at
6 16.)

7 Plaintiff moves to exclude Dr. Howitt’s testimony that “(i) the Subject Shirt is
8 100 percent cotton, (ii) the Subject Shirt’s fabric content had no impact on the
9 severity of Jesus’s burns, (iii) the Subject Shirt’s weight (areal density) was above
10 the threshold requiring flammability testing under the 1953 Flammable Fabrics Act
11 (“FFA”), 15 U.S.C. § 1191, *et seq.*, and (iv) the Subject Shirt is virtually
12 indistinguishable from exemplar shirts manufactured by Ralph Lauren
13 Corporation.” (Dkt. No. 152 at 8.)

14 Plaintiff claims that Dr. Howitt is not qualified as an expert in fiber
15 identification and textile burning behavior because he lacks superior knowledge,
16 training or experience and only has a general background in materials. For
17 example, Plaintiff asserts that Dr. Howitt’s opinions are unreliable because his
18 experience is limited to a range of non-clothing items, such as automobile
19 upholstery, house fires, furniture fires, and spontaneous ignition of adulterated rags
20 and admits no experience in evaluating rayon, never researched burning behavior of
21 cotton/rayon, cotton/nylon or cotton/nylon/rayon blends and his research into post-

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23 ⁴ As part of his motion, Plaintiff filed a request for judicial notice of screenshots from the Federal
24 Trade Commission’s online database for registration records, relevant pages from the executed
25 Asset Purchase Agreement between RLC and Schwab Defendants, copy of the search results in the
26 Competition Bureau’s Registration Records for CA Identification Number 16190, a copy of
27 Schwab Defendants’ insurance policy, and Oxford Industries, Inc.’s Form 8-K submitted to the
28 U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission. (Dkt. No. 152-1.) Defendants did not file an
opposition. Facts proper for judicial notice are those not subject to reasonable dispute and either
“generally known” in the community or “capable of accurate and ready determination” by
reference to sources whose accuracy cannot be reasonably questioned. Fed. R. Evid. 201. Because
the documents are capable of accurate and ready determination by sources whose accuracy cannot
reasonably be questioned, the Court GRANTS Plaintiff’s request for judicial notice.

1 ignition melting, shrinking, and charring behavior of textile is limited to this case.
2 Moreover, Plaintiff argues that Dr. Howitt's conclusions are complete with false
3 assumptions rather than scientifically valid principles. In opposition, Defendant
4 argues that Dr. Howitt is qualified as an expert on the opinions that Plaintiff is
5 challenging.

6 Rule 702 requires that an expert possess "knowledge, skill, experience,
7 training, or education" sufficient to "assist" the trier of fact, which is "satisfied
8 where expert testimony advances the trier of fact's understanding to any degree."
9 Abarca v. Franklin Cnty. Water Dist., 761 F. Supp. 2d 1007, 1029-30 (E.D. Cal.
10 2011) (citations omitted). "The threshold for qualification is low for purposes of
11 admissibility; minimal foundation of knowledge, skill, and experience suffices."
12 PixArt Imaging, Inc. v. Avago Tech. Gen. IP (Singapore) Pte. Ltd., No. C 10-00544
13 JW, 2011 WL 5417090, at *4 (N.D. Cal. Oct. 27, 2011) (citing Hangarter, 373 F.3d
14 at 1015-16) (25 years working in the insurance industry in general provided
15 "minimal foundation of knowledge, skill, and experience" to qualify as expert in
16 practices and norms of insurance companies in the context of a bad faith claim). "A
17 witness can qualify as an expert through practical experience in a particular field,
18 not just through academic training." Rogers v. Raymark Indus., Inc., 922 F.2d
19 1426, 1429 (9th Cir. 1991).

20 "Rule 702 is broadly phrased and intended to embrace more than a narrow
21 definition of qualified expert," Thomas, 42 F.3d at 1269, and "[g]aps in an expert
22 witness's qualifications or knowledge generally go to the weight of the witness's
23 testimony, not its admissibility," Abarca, 761 F. Supp. 2d at 1028 (quoting
24 Robinson v. GEICO General Ins. Co., 447 F.3d 1096, 1100 (8th Cir. 2006))
25 (internal quotation marks omitted). An expert's lack of specialization affects the
26 weight of his or her testimony and not its admissibility. In re Silicone Gel Breast
27 Implants Prods. Liab. Litig., 318 F. Supp. 2d 879, 889 (C.D. Cal. 2004) (citing
28 Holbrook v. Lykes Bros. S.S. Co., 80 F.3d 777, 782 (3d Cir. 1996)); see also

1 Hangarter, 373 F.3d at 1015-16 (finding the district court did not abuse its
2 discretion in permitting expert witness with general qualifications in insurance field
3 to testify specifically about bad faith claims); United States v. Garcia 7 F.3d 885,
4 889 (9th Cir. 1993) (“lack of particularized expertise goes to the weight accorded
5 her testimony, not to the admissibility of her opinion as an expert.”).

6 Dr. Howitt has a Ph.D. in the Science of Materials and Engineering from the
7 University of California at Berkeley, and a B.A. in Metallurgy from Oxford
8 University, and is a Professor Emeritus of the Science of Materials at the University
9 of California at Davis. (Dkt. No. 172-1, Howitt Decl. ¶ 2.) He specializes in the
10 characterization and behavior of materials with specialized expertise in ignition and
11 combustion of materials. Id. For the past thirty (30) years, Dr. Howitt has taught
12 classes on the characterization of materials with techniques such as “optical
13 microscopy (including polarized light microscopy ‘PLM’ and phase-contrast
14 microscopy ‘PCM’); electron microscopy (including scanning electron microscopy
15 (‘SEM’) transmission electron microscopy (‘TEM’) and scanning transmission
16 electron microscopy (‘STEM’); spectroscopy and chromatography (including
17 Fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy (‘FTIR’), mass spectrometry (‘MS’) gas
18 chromatography (‘GCMS’) and X-ray microanalysis (including energy dispersive x-
19 ray spectroscopy (‘EDS’), wavelength dispersive x-ray spectroscopy (‘WDS’) and
20 x-ray powder diffraction (‘XRD’).” (Id. ¶ 3.) He is also past Chairman of the
21 Steering Committee of National Center for Electron Microscopy, a U.S. Department
22 of Energy National Laboratory operated by the University of California. (Id. ¶ 4.)
23 He was also the founder of the fully-credentialed Forensic Science Graduate
24 Program at U.C. Davis and established the Advanced Materials Characterization
25 and Testing facility. (Id.) He has published numerous journal articles, professional
26 papers and books over the past forty (40) years. (Dkt. No. 172-3, Howitt Decl., Ex.
27 B.) Lastly, he has been deposed and testified in court as a forensic materials expert
28 on more than 120 occasions. (Dkt. No. 172-1, Howitt Decl. ¶ 4.)

1 Dr. Howitt's over thirty years of experience in the field of materials science,
2 and specialization in ignition and combustion of materials provides a "minimal
3 foundation of knowledge, skill, and experience" to qualify as an expert in fiber
4 identification and textile burning behavior. See Hangarter, 373 F.3d at 1015-16.
5 Moreover, he taught courses in the characterization of materials using techniques
6 that are also used to identify fibers such as PLM, SEM, and FTIR. (See Dkt. No.
7 148, Ds' Mot. To Exclude Dr. Hall at 7 ("Fiber identification can be measured by
8 various methods, including Scanning Electron Microscopy (SEM), Optical
9 Microscopy, Polarized Light Microscopy ('PLM'), Infrared Spectroscopy, Fourier
10 Transform Infrared Spectroscopy ('FTIR'), and Attenuated Total reflectance
11 ('ATR').") Any challenges to Dr. Howitt's qualification based on his lack of
12 specialization can be made at trial. See In re Silicone Gel Breast Implants Prods.
13 Liab. Litig., 318 F. Supp. 2d at 889. Accordingly, Plaintiff's argument challenging
14 Dr. Howitt's qualifications is without merit.

15 Plaintiff also argues that Dr. Howitt's opinions demonstrate a
16 misunderstanding of scientific principles relating to fiber identification by relying
17 on incorrect assumptions and ignoring accepted protocols and recognized standards
18 for fiber sampling. Plaintiff does not dispute that the tests used by Dr. Howitt are
19 used by experts in fiber identification. (Dkt. No. 152 at 12 (plaintiff acknowledges
20 that the tests used by Dr. Howitt are "markers an expert in fiber identification might
21 look to").) Instead, Plaintiff challenges Dr. Howitt's use of the methodologies to
22 reach his conclusion which goes to the weight of the evidence and not admissibility.
23 See Kennedy, 161 F.3d at 1231 ("Disputes as to . . . faults in his use of [a particular]
24 methodology . . . go to the weight, not the admissibility, of his testimony.");
25 Shimozono v. May Dept. Stores Co., No. 00-04261 WJR, 2002 WL 3437390, at *8
26 (C.D. Cal. Nov. 20, 2002) (citation omitted) (arguments that an expert relied on
27 unfounded assumptions in forming his opinion go to the weight, not the
28 admissibility, of expert testimony).

1 Similarly, Plaintiff challenges Dr. Howitt's opinion concerning the areal
2 density (weight) of the Shirt because he failed to adhere to the accepted standards of
3 measurement such as failing to properly condition the sample by removing
4 excessive moisture. Dr. Howitt responds that Plaintiff is mistaken in his argument,
5 citing published literature, and disputing Plaintiff's arguments concerning the
6 acceptable standards. Plaintiff's arguments challenge how Dr. Howitt performed a
7 particular methodology which goes to the weight of Dr. Howitt's testimony and not
8 its admissibility. See id.

9 Next, Plaintiff contends that Dr. Howitt blindly accepted the conclusion of
10 others while having no knowledge of the methods used to obtain the results. He
11 argues that Dr. Howitt's bare reliance on the reputation, expertise and judgment of
12 three scientists to conduct fiber identification without any information to assess the
13 trustworthiness and reliability is insufficient. After conducting his own SEM and
14 optical microscopic analysis of the swatch, Dr. Howitt had it examined by three
15 leading, independent national laboratories to determine its composition by using
16 different methods of fiber identification. (Dkt. No. 172-1, Howitt Decl. ¶¶ 14-17.)
17 Dr. Howitt responds that he has extensive experience and indisputable credentials in
18 the optical, FTIR and other analytical techniques used by the three independent
19 laboratories. (Id. ¶ 18.)

20 Under Rule 703, an expert may base an opinion on facts or data "perceived by
21 or made known to the expert at or before the hearing." Fed. R. Evid. 703. Rule 703
22 allows, otherwise inadmissible evidence, to be admissible if the expert opinion is
23 based on "facts or data" that is "of a type reasonably relied upon by experts in the
24 particular field in forming opinions." Fed. R. Evid. 703.⁵ "[A]n expert may rely on

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26 ⁵ Rule 703 provides,

27 An expert may base an opinion on facts or data in the case that the expert has been
28 made aware of or personally observed. If experts in the particular field would

1 data that she did not personally collect,” and “need not have conducted her own
2 tests.” Gussack Realty Co. v. Xerox Corp., 224 F.3d 85, 94-95 (2d Cir. 2000).
3 “[N]umerous courts have held that reliance on scientific test results prepared by
4 others may constitute the type of evidence that is reasonably relied upon by experts
5 for purposes of Rule of Evidence 703.” Monsanto Co. v. David, 516 F.3d 1009,
6 1015 (Fed. Cir. 2008). Rule 703 “merely relaxes, for experts, the requirement that
7 witnesses have personal knowledge of the matter to which they testify.” Claar v.
8 Burlington Northern R. Co., 29 F.3d 499, 501 (9th Cir. 1994); see also Daubert, 509
9 U.S. at 591 (noting that Rule 703's “relaxation of the usual requirement of firsthand
10 knowledge . . . is premised on an assumption that the expert’s opinion will have a
11 reliable basis in the knowledge and experience of his discipline.”)

12 Here, it is not disputed that experts in the field of fiber identification would
13 reasonably rely on the facts or data of the three laboratories in forming an opinion.
14 The laboratories conducted fiber identification tests recognized and relied upon by
15 experts in the field, including those performed by Plaintiff’s experts. See Green v.
16 Allstate Ins. Co., No. 11–cv–00210 JWS, 2012 WL 3237166, at *2 (D. Alaska Aug.
17 7, 2012) (expert could present opinion of chemist who conducted independent
18 testing of fire debris samples as the data would be reasonably relied upon by experts
19 in the field of fire investigation). Therefore, Dr. Howitt’s reliance on the results of
20 three laboratories conducting fiber identification was not improper and the
21 challenged testimony is admissible.

22 _____
23 FOOTNOTE CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

24 reasonably rely on those kinds of facts or data in forming an opinion on the subject,
25 they need not be admissible for the opinion to be admitted. But if the facts or data
26 would otherwise be inadmissible, the proponent of the opinion may disclose them to
27 the jury only if their probative value in helping the jury evaluate the opinion
substantially outweighs their prejudicial effect.

28 Fed. R. Evid. 703.

1 Based on the above, the Court DENIES Plaintiff's motion to exclude the
2 testimony of Dr. Howitt based on his qualifications and the testing he performed.

3 However, the Court GRANTS Plaintiff's motion to exclude a limited portion
4 of his testimony. Plaintiff argues that Dr. Howitt should be precluded from
5 asserting that the exemplar shirts he purchased were almost identical to the Shirt
6 and were manufactured by Ralph Lauren Corporation ("RLC") as the exemplar
7 shirts were not manufactured by RLC. Defendants do not oppose or address this
8 issue in their response.

9 Dr. Howitt obtained 8-10 Ralph Lauren brand gingham shirts on eBay to
10 compare their characteristic construction to the Shirt. He concluded that two of the
11 exemplar shirts he purchased were nearly identical to the Shirt, (Dkt. No. 152-5,
12 Weitz Decl., Ex. 14, Howitt Depo. at 16:4-18:3), and subsequently concluded that
13 two exemplar shirts, although labeled with different serial numbers, were
14 manufactured by Ralph Lauren Corporation. (Id. at 159:1-161:8.)

15 The two matching exemplar shirts were labeled RN0103446/CA16190 and
16 RN 19672. Plaintiff's search of the RN and CA numbers in the Federal Trade
17 Commission's online database revealed that two exemplar shirts were manufactured
18 by RL Childrenswear LLC, and Oxford Industries, who was the predecessor
19 licensee to Schwab Defendants, and not by RLC. (Dkt. No. 152-2, Szeto Decl. ¶¶ 2,
20 4.) However, one of the other exemplar shirts, labeled RN 41381, was
21 manufactured by Ralph Lauren Corporation. (Id. ¶ 3.)

22 It is not clear from the cited deposition testimony of Dr. Howitt whether the
23 two matching exemplar shirts he references are RN0103446/CA 16190 and RN
24 19672, which were manufactured by RL Childrenswear LLC and Oxford Industries,
25 or whether one of the matching exemplar shirts also includes RN 41381, a shirt
26 manufactured by RLC. As such, the Court GRANTS in part Plaintiff's motion to
27 exclude Dr. Howitt from asserting that all, except one exemplar shirt, RN 41381,
28 were manufactured by RLC.

1 In sum, the Court GRANTS in part and DENIES in part Plaintiff's motion to
2 exclude Dr. Howitt's testimony.

3 **C. Defendants' Motion to Exclude Expert Testimony of Dr. David M. Hall,**

4 Dr. David Hall, Ph.D., P.E., F.T.I., F.S.D.C., is Plaintiff's designated expert
5 on fiber and textiles and is expected to testify regarding the fiber content of the
6 Shirt, flammability characteristics and burning behavior of clothing and fibers.
7 (Dkt. No. 128 at 16.)

8 Defendants move to exclude Dr. Hall's testimony that "(1) the Shirt's fabric
9 "was made from a blend of no more than 90% cotton, at least 4-5% nylon and at
10 least 5-6% rayon"; (2) the subject shirt was comprised of fabric that was constructed
11 of core-spun, low-quality immature cotton; (3) the rayon and nylon were
12 intentionally added as a component part of each yarn to strengthen the lower cost,
13 lower-quality cotton, increasing the profits of the manufacturer; and (4) plaintiff's
14 injuries "would have been much less severe if he had been wearing a 100% cotton
15 shirt." (Dkt. No. 168-3, Weitz Decl., Ex. 2, Hall Decl. ¶¶ 6, 7, 15.) Plaintiff argues
16 that Dr. Hall should not be excluded because he has over sixty years of practical,
17 academic and industry experience in fiber identification and in flammability
18 characteristics and burning behavior of textiles and fibers.

19 Dr. Hall was a Professor of Textile Engineering and Material Engineering at
20 Auburn University until his retirement in 1995. (Dkt. No. 168-3, Weitz Decl., Ex. 2,
21 Hall Decl. ¶ 2.) He taught undergraduate and graduate level classes in all areas of
22 "Textile Chemistry including, Preparation Dyeing and Finishing, Textile Sizing,
23 Chemical Testing Methods, Natural and Man Made Fibers as well as laundry
24 practices for consumer textiles." (Id. ¶ 3.) He received numerous research grants
25 and published the results widely in the area of "textile technology, specifically in
26 the use of Scanning Electron Microscopy and Energy Dispersive Analysis for
27 problem solving applications." (Id. ¶ 4.) He has published over 45 refereed
28 research papers and other "state-of-the-art" type papers, presented over 75

1 technical/research papers to different organizations in the areas of textile science
2 and technology, has been a reviewer of several peer journals, holds 35 issued U.S.
3 patents in the areas of textile science or applied textile technology, and has
4 substantial experience in textile forensics and finally, performed analyses and/or
5 tests for over 200 textile related firms. (Id.) Prior to his career, he worked in his
6 family's cotton fields of Alabama. (Dkt. No. 168-19, Weitz Decl., Ex. 18, Hall
7 Decl. ¶ 2.) He even created a "smart cotton" process that creates a stronger fiber at
8 significantly lower cost than traditional processes and received the 2015 Award by
9 the Research & Design Magazine's coveted Top Patents. (Id. ¶ 3.) Dr. Hall has a
10 similar understanding of rayon and nylon since he worked at companies that
11 manufactured rayon and nylon. (Id. ¶ 4.)

12 Defendants argue that Dr. Hall's fiber identification based on SEM is
13 inherently unreliable since he is not a SEM expert and relied on SEM images
14 produced from testing performed by a colleague. Plaintiff responds that while Dr.
15 Hall is not a SEM operator, he is an expert in analyzing information obtained from a
16 SEM. (Dkt. No. 168-2, Weitz Decl., Ex. 1, Hall Depo. at 27:13-23⁶.) Moreover, in
17 this case, Dr. Hall worked side by side with Dr. Michael Miller, who performed the
18 SEM, and the samples were prepared using Dr. Hall's published technique. (Id. at
19 24:15-25:4; 84:18-86:14.) Further, Dr. Hall's numerous peer-reviewed publications
20 show that he is an expert in analyzing SEM results. (Id., Ex. 3, Hall CV.)

21 Under Rule 703, an expert may rely on tests not performed by him if "experts
22 in the particular field would reasonably rely on those kinds of facts or data in
23 forming an opinion on the subject." Fed. R. Evid. 703. Defendants acknowledge
24 that SEM is one method used to identify fiber and SEM is, in fact, a method that
25 experts in the field of fiber identification rely on in forming an opinion.
26 Defendants' argument is without merit as Dr. Hall can rely on the SEM testing

27 ⁶Deposition page numbers are based on the pagination of the deposition transcript.
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1 performed by Dr. Miller since it is a test reasonably relied on by experts in the field
2 of fiber identification. See Fed. R. Evid. 703. Moreover, Dr. Hall has extensive
3 experience in interpreting and analyzing SEM data.

4 Defendants next contend that “Dr. Hall’s testimony regarding his fiber
5 identification analysis should be excluded for the following reasons: (1) Dr. Hall’s
6 analysis was limited to only looking at the fiber’s cross-sections through SEM and
7 not examining the fibers longitudinally; (2) Dr. Hall improperly conducted the SEM
8 procedure and his opinion that the fabric was ‘core spun’ is not supported; and (3)
9 Dr. Hall failed to comply with his own procedure of following his SEM analysis
10 with other confirmatory tests, such as ‘wet chemistry’ testing.” (Dkt. No. 148 at 11-
11 12.) These arguments concern alleged faults in using a methodology and go to the
12 weight of Dr. Hall’s testimony and not to admissibility. See Kennedy, 161 F.3d at
13 1231. These challenges may be made at trial.

14 Moreover, Defendants challenge Dr. Hall’s burn testing by placing exemplar
15 shirts on a mannequin and setting them on fire with a lighter as lacking scientific
16 value. First, they assert that Dr. Hall is not a flammability expert and he seeks to
17 testify concerning the flammability characteristics of the Shirt. Next, Defendants
18 contend that the testing is inherently unreliable because the Shirt should have been
19 conditioned on the mannequin the way it was conditioned on Plaintiff at the time it
20 caught fire and the shirt should have been lit the same way Plaintiff’s shirt was lit
21 on fire. Plaintiff dispute Defendants’ criticisms of Dr. Hall’s mannequin burn
22 demonstration.

23 Dr. Hall obtained an exemplar red-and-white Ralph Lauren brand short-
24 sleeved, boys’ gingham shirts, labeled 100% cotton from a department store. The
25 shirt consisted of a blend of cotton, nylon and rayon although the exact percentage
26 composition was not known. (Dkt. No. 168-1, Weitz Decl., Ex. 1, Dr. Hall Depo. at
27 319:16-23.) Dr. Hall placed the shirts on a mannequin in an indoor burn facility and
28 ignited the bottom corner of the fabric to demonstrate how clothing fires progress in

1 real-world conditions.⁷ Plaintiff argues that it was not necessary to match the exact
2 conditions that existed on the day that Plaintiff was injured because Dr. Hall was
3 presenting a general demonstration of garment flammability and fire behavior and
4 was not attempting to quantify Plaintiff's experience. Dr. Hall was only presenting
5 a general demonstration of garment flammability and fire behavior concerning
6 blended fibers similar to Plaintiff's Shirt, and not that the burn demonstration is a
7 re-enactment of what happened on the day of the incident.

8 The Court finds that Plaintiff has failed to demonstrate that the burn testing is
9 relevant or reliable as to whether Plaintiff's alleged blended shirt burned differently
10 than a 100% cotton shirt. Dr. Hall does not know the percentage blend of the
11 exemplar shirts. His deposition transcript that has been provided to the Court is
12 missing the pages where Dr. Hall testified that the exemplar shirts were made from a
13 blend of cotton, nylon and rayon although they were labeled 100% cotton. The
14 parties have not provided Dr. Hall's conclusions concerning the burn testing. In
15 addition, it does not appear there was a comparison with burning a 100% cotton
16 shirt. Dr. Hall's testing lacks sufficient information to establish comparators that
17 are reliable and will assist the jury. Moreover, any probative value of the test is
18 outweighed by the likelihood of confusing the issues at trial and producing unfair
19 prejudice. Based on the state of the record, the Court excludes Dr. Hall's testimony
20 on burn testing on the mannequins.

21 Furthermore, Defendants argue that Dr. Hall should be precluded from
22 opining or speculating on their purported reasons for using certain materials. Dr.
23 Hall testified that the addition of rayon and nylon would have been the result of a
24

25 ⁷ Plaintiff cites to pages of the deposition transcript of Dr. Hall; however, all pages
26 cited to his deposition are not in the record as the deposition transcript stops at page
27 329. (Dkt. No. 168 at 17; Dkt. No. 168-2 at 157.) The supported deposition
28 testimony asserting that the exemplar shirts consisted of a blend of cotton, nylon
and rayon is not in the record. (Dkt. No. 168 at 17 (citing to Dr. Hall's deposition
transcript at 330:1-7; 330:13-331:5; 331:11-332:3; 332:9-14).)

1 conscious decision by the manufacturer to reduce overall production costs. Because
2 much of the cotton in the Shirt was immature, making it weaker than higher quality
3 cotton, use of rayon and nylon strengthened the low-quality cotton yarn. (Dkt. No.,
4 Dr. Hall Decl. ¶ 15.) Plaintiff responds that Dr. Hall is a textile engineer with
5 extensive experience developing new fibers, textiles, finishes, and manufacturing
6 processes. While he has not conducted the exact cost savings from the addition of
7 rayon and nylon, his experiences provide sufficient information for him to reliably
8 opine on the manufacturer's motives for yarn design. Plaintiff argues it would help
9 the jury determine liability if it can understand why and how nylon and rayon would
10 be blended with cotton. While Dr. Hall has extensive background, experience, and
11 knowledge in the textile industry, including the cotton, nylon and rayon industries,
12 the Court concludes that Defendants' motive for blending nylon and rayon with
13 cotton is marginally relevant on the issue of liability. Defendants' motive for
14 blending does not show whether the Shirt was 100% cotton or how it affected
15 flammability. What little probative value that it possesses to prove liability is
16 outweighed by confusion of the issues. This evidence will be excluded at the trial
17 on liability and damages. The Court will DEFER ruling on the motion to exclude
18 this evidence at a punitive damages trial, in the event there is a jury finding of
19 liability.

20 Accordingly, the Court GRANTS in part and DENIES in part Defendants'
21 motion to exclude the testimony of Dr. Hall.

22 **D. Defendants' Motion to Exclude Expert Testimony of Dr. David Xu**

23 Dr. David Xu, Ph.D., P.E. is Plaintiff's designated expert in materials and is
24 expected to testify regarding fiber content, flammability characteristics and burning
25 behavior of the Shirt, clothing, and fibers. (Dkt. No. 128 at 16.)

26 Defendants move to exclude Dr. Xu's testimony that the "results of Scanning
27 Electron Microscopy ("SEM") and Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy
28 ("FTIR") tests each showed the Subject Shirt was composed of approximately ~90%

1 cotton, 4-5% nylon, and 5-6% rayon.” (Dkt. No. 167-4, Xu Decl. ¶ 3.)

2 First, Defendants argue that Dr. Xu is not qualified to opine on fiber
3 identification and on flammability. As to fiber identification, Defendants describe
4 Dr. Xu’s experience with fiber identification as having taken a course in college that
5 discussed fiber identification which was about half an hour to an hour long; he has
6 been retained as an expert in four to five cases relating to fiber identification of
7 apparel; he conducted two research projects for Plaintiff’s former attorney; he
8 visited Dr. Hall twice; and he visited a textile plant in Alabama and two plants in
9 Guatemala. Plaintiff argues that Dr. Xu’s background as a Professional Engineer in
10 addition to his efforts of gaining expertise in the field of textiles and fibers qualify
11 him to testify on fiber identification. Specifically, Dr. Xu spent three days in
12 Alabama learning fiber identification from Dr. David Hall, (separately from this
13 case), explored yarn manufacturing facilities in the U.S. and abroad, (separately
14 from the case), and learned from other fiber identification experts and engineers,
15 (separately from this case). (Dkt. No. 167-10, Weitz Decl., Ex. 9, Xu Depo. at 77:1-
16 19; Dkt. No. 167-11, Weitz Decl., Ex. 10, Xu Depo. at 306:4-24; 307:7-22; 348:11-
17 349:10.) At the cotton plant in Alabama, Dr. Xu talked to the plant manager for an
18 hour or two about the process for manufacturing cotton yarns from start to finish.
19 (Id. at 307:15-22;308:2-18.) He also visited two textile plants in Guatemala and
20 spoke to the textile engineer about their process. (Id. at 309:7-310:15.)

21 As to textile flammability, Defendants argue that Dr. Xu testified that while
22 he talked a bit about flammability characteristics, he admits he is not the
23 flammability expert and would not offer extensive amount of testimony on it. (Dkt.
24 No. 149-2, Blackwell Decl., Ex. B., Dr. Xu Depo. at 212:8-13.) Based solely on
25 these statements that Dr. Xu admitted he is not an expert in flammability expert,
26 Defendants move to exclude his testimony. Plaintiff rebuts Defendants’ argument
27 that while is not a fire science expert, he understands fire science and has some
28 knowledge of burns since he has worked on many scalding cases involving hot

1 water. (Dkt. No. 167-11, Weitz Decl., Ex. 10, Dr. Xu Depo. at 323:17-324:4.)
2 Moreover, building upon his qualifications as a professional engineer and a doctor
3 of materials engineering, he worked with Dr. Marcelo Hirschler, who was an expert
4 witness for Macy's and Ralph Lauren in this case, and discussed her and Dr.
5 Zicherman's published research in the areas of textile flammability. His specialized
6 knowledge comes from his "understanding of fire science, literature review, Dr.
7 Hall's textbook, and discussions with Drs. Hall, Hirschler, and Zicherman." (Dkt.
8 No. 167 at 8.)

9 Rule 702 requires that an expert have specialized "knowledge, skill,
10 experience, training, or education." Fed. R. Evid. 702. "A witness can qualify as an
11 expert through practical experience in a particular field, not just through academic
12 training." Rogers v. Raymark Indus., Inc., 922 F.2d 1426, 1429 (9th Cir. 1991).

13
14 "Education" sufficient to qualify an expert may be formal, resulting in
15 a degree or certification. "Education" also may be based on informal
16 self-study or independent research. "Training" usually means on the
17 job instruction or work-related classes. "Skill" is a specialized aptitude
18 developed as a result of significant involvement with a specific subject.
"Experience" may qualify a witness as an expert so long as it is
obtained in a practical context.

19 21 Charles Alan Wright & Victor James Gold, Federal Practice and Procedure:
20 Federal Rule of Evidence § 6264.1 (2d ed. 1997). As noted above, any gaps in a
21 witness' qualifications or knowledge or lack of specialization go to the weight of
22 his testimony and not admissibility. See Abarca, 761 F. Supp. 2d at 1028; In re
23 Silicone Gel Breast Implants, Prods. Liab. Litig., 318 F. Supp. at 889.

24 Dr. Xu, Ph.D., P.E., has a Bachelor of Science, Master of Science and Ph.D.
25 in Material Science and Engineering From U.C. Berkeley. (Dkt. No. 167-4, Weitz
26 Decl., Ex. 4, Dr. Xu's CV.) He is a Professional Engineer in chemical, materials,
27 and mechanical engineering, with expertise in compositional analysis, electron
28 microscopy, failure analysis, polymers, chemical properties, structures and bonding.

1 (Id.) With this background, he conducted self-study and research in the areas of
2 fiber identification and flammability characteristics. Any challenges to the
3 sufficiency of his qualifications to testify in these areas should be raised at trial and
4 not in a motion to exclude. See Abarca, 761 F. Supp. 2d at 1028; In re Silicone Gel
5 Breast Implants, Prods. Liab. Litig., 318 F. Supp. at 889. Similarly, Defendants
6 may challenge Dr. Xu's testimony on flammability as cumulative to the extent that it
7 merely repeats the testimony of the fabric flammability expert.

8 Next, Defendants contend that Dr. Xu's opinion are not reliable and based on
9 questionable methodology. Essentially, Defendants raise numerous issues and
10 faults with Dr. Xu's methodology. (Dkt. No. 149 at 17-23.) As discussed above,
11 any faults in the methodology employed go to the weight and not admissibility of
12 the testimony. See Kennedy, 161 F.3d at 1231. Thus, the Court DENIES
13 Defendants' motion to exclude the expert testimony of Dr. Xu.⁸

14 **E. Defendants' Motion to Preclude Testimony of Dr. Michel F. Brones**

15 Michel Brones, M.D. is Plaintiff's designated expert on plastic and
16 reconstructive surgery and will testify concerning the nature and extent of Plaintiff's
17 burn injuries, the reasonableness and necessity of his medical treatment to date,
18 future treatment and Plaintiff's prognosis. (Dkt. No. 128 at 16.)

19 Defendants move to exclude testimony of Dr. Brones that "(1) Plaintiff's
20 burns were of the depth and pattern that to him indicate the textile material plaintiff
21 was wearing was a mixture of cotton and another material . . . ; (2) the type of burns
22 plaintiff sustained as to the depth, location and uniformity are not consistent with
23 100% cotton fabric and are much more consistent with a mixed-blend fabric . . . ;

24
25 ⁸ In their reply, Defendants argue, for the first time, that Dr. Xu's opinion as to the intentional
26 addition of nylon and rayon to the Shirt is speculation. (Dkt. No. 177 at 7.) The Court declines to
27 address an issue raised for the first time in a reply brief. See State of Nev. v. Watkins, 914 F.2d
28 1545, 1560 (9th Cir.1990) ("[Parties] cannot raise a new issue for the first time in their reply
briefs."); Ass'n of Irrigated Residents v. C & R Vanderham Dairy, 435 F. Supp. 2d 1078, 1089
(E.D. Cal. 2006) ("It is inappropriate to consider arguments raised for the first time in a reply
brief.").

1 and (3) blended fabric shirts cause uniform burns because the textile materials stick
2 to the body, as opposed to burning quickly and disintegrating” (Dkt. No. 147
3 at 7-8.) “Dr. Brones also testified the blend of Plaintiff’s shirt caused 60-65% more
4 damage than a 100% cotton shirt would have caused.” (Id. at 8.)

5 First, Defendants seek exclusion of Dr. Brones’ testimony concerning fiber
6 identification and flammability as he is not qualified to testify about materials
7 identification or the flammability characteristics of the Shirt. They claim his
8 knowledge of treating burn victims does not qualify him as a fiber identification or
9 flammability expert. Plaintiff opposes arguing Dr. Brones is well qualified to opine
10 on the characteristics of the Shirt based on his knowledge and experience of having
11 treated thousands of burn victims.

12 Federal Rule of Evidence 702 requires that a testifying expert be “qualified as
13 an expert by knowledge, skill, experience, training, or education.” Fed. R. Evid.
14 702. “[T]he use of the disjunctive indicates that a witness may be qualified as an
15 expert on any one of the five listed grounds.” Friendship Heights Assoc. v.
16 Vlastimil Koubek, 785 F.2d 1154, 1159 (4th Cir. 1986). The threshold for
17 qualification is low; a minimal foundation of knowledge, skill, and experience
18 suffices. Hangarter, 373 F.3d at 1015-16; see also Thomas, 42 F.3d at 1269.
19 Moreover, “lack of particularized expertise goes to the weight accorded her
20 testimony, not to the admissibility of her opinion as an expert.” United States v.
21 Garcia, 7 F.3d 885, 889 (9th Cir. 1993). Furthermore, to testify as an expert, an
22 individual “need not be officially credentialed in the specific matter under dispute.”
23 Massok v. Keller Indus., Inc., 147 Fed. App’x 651, 656 (9th Cir. 2005) (citing
24 Garcia, 7 F.3d at 889-90).

25 Dr. Brones is a board-certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon who
26 specializes in burn injuries. (Dkt. No. 165-2, Sizemore Decl., Ex. 1, Brones Depo.
27 at 24:18-24; id., Ex. 2.) He has treated a wide array of burn injuries including
28 flame, scalding, electrical, chemical, lighting, contact burns, and x-ray burns. (Id.,

1 Ex. 1, Brones Depo. at 24:12-17.) He worked as a burn surgeon at Grossman Burn
2 Center, which is the largest and busiest private burn facility in the United States
3 from 1981 to 1998. (Id., Ex. 2; id., Ex. 1, Brones Depo. at 70:18-20.) He saw
4 thousands of patients with textile burns and would try to analyze the nature of the
5 materials they were wearing and looked for burn patterns. (Id., Ex. 1, Brones Depo.
6 at 70:18-71:7.) He was able to distinguish whether the materials were synthetic,
7 natural, pure cotton or a blend, and after treating thousands of patients, he learned to
8 differentiate by the pattern of the burn what the most likely textile caused the burn.
9 (Id.) Dr. Brones has also served as an expert witness in more than one thousand
10 cases offering testimony on topics including the “nature, extent, and causation of
11 burn injuries, the reasonableness and necessity of claimed medical treatment and
12 bills, and the reasonableness and necessity of future treatment.” (Dkt. No. 165-5,
13 Brones Decl. ¶ 4.) He has also testified in four cases “opining on the interplay
14 between characteristics of materials and textiles, burn patterns, and subsequent
15 medical treatment.” (Id. ¶ 5.)

16 Dr. Brones’ experience and training in treating thousands of textile burn
17 injuries and his learned ability to distinguish burn patterns based on the materials
18 the patients were wearing provide more than a minimal foundation that make him
19 qualified to testify about the composition of the fabric worn by Plaintiff based on
20 the burn patterns on his body. Any issues Defendants have with Dr. Brones’
21 qualifications can be challenged through cross examination. See Abarca, 761 F.
22 Supp. 2d at 1028. Moreover, any alleged contradictory statements Dr. Brones made
23 during the litigation may affect credibility determinations that go to the weight, not
24 admissibility of the evidence and can be challenged at trial.

25 Second, Defendants argue that Dr. Brones’ opinions concerning fiber analysis
26 and identification are unreliable because he made his conclusion based on a highly
27 pixelated and blurry photograph taken over 12 years ago on the date of the incident.
28 (Dkt. No. 147-5, Blackwell Decl., Ex. C.) Defendants’ retained dermatologist

1 expert, Dr. Edward Ross, testified that that he would question whether one can tell
2 from an ICU burn picture the exact fiber type. (Dkt. No. 147-6, Blackwell Decl.,
3 Ex. E, Ross Depo. at 67:10-68:25.) Plaintiff responds that Defendants
4 mischaracterize Dr. Brones' methodology as he did not rely solely on the
5 photograph but also relied on Plaintiff's medical records, and Dr. Brones' training,
6 education and experience as a burn surgeon. Moreover, he challenges Dr. Ross'
7 opinion as he is a dermatologist and lacks the same training and experience as Dr.
8 Brones. Defendants' argument concerning faults in Dr. Brones' methodology raise
9 questions that address the weight, not admissibility of his testimony. See Kennedy,
10 161 F.3d at 1231.

11 Next, Defendants argue that Dr. Brones' opinion that the uniformity of the
12 burn pattern could only occur if the shirt was a cotton blend, and not 100% cotton is
13 unreliable because he failed to consider alternatives to his opinion. Plaintiff
14 contends that Dr. Brones discounted obvious alternatives and explained the
15 foundation of his opinions and why other conceivable causes were excludable.
16 (Dkt. No. 165-2, Sizemore Decl., Ex. 1, Brones Depo. at 66:10-68:11.) Moreover,
17 he argues that the existence of causes goes to the weight, not admissibility of the
18 opinion.

19 Generally, "an expert need not rule out every potential cause in order to
20 satisfy Daubert," as long as the expert's testimony "address[es] obvious alternative
21 causes and provide[s] a reasonable explanation for dismissing specific alternate
22 factors identified by the defendant." In re Fosamax Products Liab. Litig., 647 F.
23 Supp. 2d 265, 278 (S.D.N.Y. 2009). It is not required that experts eliminate all
24 other possible causes of a condition for the expert's testimony to be reliable, but
25 only that the proposed cause "be a substantial causative factor." Messick v.
26 Novartis Pharms. Corp., 747 F.3d 1193, 1199 (9th Cir. 2014). Nonetheless, a
27 failure to address alternatives causes to the pattern and depth of the burn is a subject
28 proper for cross-examination, and not admissibility. See Stanley v. Novartis

1 Pharms. Corp., 11 F. Supp. 3d 987, 1001 (C.D. Cal. 2014) (“to the extent Defendant
2 argues that [the doctor] did not adequately rule out additional factors, this is a
3 credibility determination that goes to the weight and the admissibility of his
4 opinions.”) (citing cases); see also Ambrosini v. Labarraque, 101 F.3d 129, 140
5 (D.C. Cir. 1996).

6 The Court concludes that Dr. Brones is qualified to testify and his experience,
7 knowledge, education concerning regarding burn injuries and materials are beyond
8 the common knowledge of the average layman and would assist the trier of fact in
9 determining the type of fabric Plaintiff was wearing on the day of the incident.
10 However, based on the record, the Court finds that Dr. Brones’ opinion that the
11 blend of the Shirt caused 60-60% more damage is speculative and unsupported by
12 any reliable methodology.

13 The Court GRANTS in part and DENIES in part Defendants’ motion to
14 exclude the expert testimony of Dr. Brones.

15 **F. Defendants’ Motion to Exclude Expert Testimony of Andrew Ellison**

16 Plaintiff’s designated forensic engineer, Andrew Ellison, P.E., is expected to
17 testify about flammability characteristics and burning behavior of textiles and
18 fabrics. (Dkt. No. 128 at 16.)

19 Defendants seek to exclude Mr. Ellison’s testimony on human burn injuries
20 on the basis that he is not qualified since he has no training, education or experience
21 in the field of human burn injuries. Responding, Plaintiff argues that Mr. Ellison is
22 qualified to testify on human burn injuries based on his extensive experience in the
23 field of human skin burns resulting from thermal heat transfer involving a textile
24 medium. Mr. Ellison is being offered to testify concerning the field of forensic
25 engineering as it “relates to textiles and fabrics, the thermal transfer characteristics
26 of those materials when exposed to fire, and the impact on human skin as a result of
27 that thermal transfer”, (Dkt. No. 164 at 6), and not as a medical expert to opine on
28 Plaintiff’s burn injuries.

1 Ellison graduated from Worcester Polytechnic Institute with a Bachelor of
2 Science degree in Mechanical Engineering and a Master of Science degree in Fire
3 Protection Engineering. (Dkt. No. 156-2, Irving Decl., Ex. 2, Ellison Decl. ¶ 3.) He
4 is a licensed professional engineer, trained and experienced in performing fire
5 origin and cause investigations, and is a Certified Fire and Explosion Investigator.
6 (Dkt. No. 164-3, Sizemore Decl., Ex. 2.) He worked with the U.S. Navy performing
7 research and testing on uniforms, protective clothing and equipment of war fighters,
8 and the majority of his work focused on flammability and thermal protective
9 personal protective clothing. (Dkt. No. 156-3, Irving Decl., Ex. 2, Ellison Decl. ¶
10 4.) He also continued developing test methods for fabrics and garments under fire
11 assault. (Id.) Since 2007, he has been a consultant on fire cause and origin,
12 mechanical & fire protection engineering, human skin burns, and fabric
13 flammability. (Id. ¶ 5.) He also published numerous papers on burning behavior
14 and flame spread. (Id. ¶ 6.) Furthermore, he has experience in textile flammability
15 testing, thermal protective properties of clothing items and the causes of thermal
16 burn injuries. (Dkt. No. 164-5, Sizemore Decl., Ex. 4.) Finally, he has been a
17 member of the Technical Committee of Wildland Firefighting Protective Clothing
18 and Equipment and a member of the American Society of Testing and Materials,
19 which promulgates standards for consumer clothing. (Dkt. No. 164-8, Sizemore
20 Decl., Ex. 7, Ellison Depo. at 69:14-70:4.)

21 Defendants assert that Mr. Ellison has never specifically published on the
22 subject of burn injuries or the relationship between clothing and burn injuries; has no
23 formal education on burn injuries, has never been retained as an expert on burn
24 injuries and has no firsthand experience in treating burn injuries.⁹ However, “Rule

25
26 ⁹ Defendants also question Mr. Ellison’s qualification as a human burn injury expert by noting
27 that prior to his involvement in the case, his CV did not mention that his area of specialty was in
28 the area of burn injuries. The record and testimony of Mr. Ellison reveal the contrary. Mr. Ellison
was disclosed as an expert witness on March 22, 2016. (Dkt. No. 156-2, Irving Decl., Ex. 1.) Mr.
Ellison testified that his January 2016 CV, which was not drafted for purposes of this litigation,

1 702 is broadly phrased and intended to embrace more than a narrow definition of
2 qualified expert” Thomas, 42 F.3d at 1269. Moreover, “[g]aps in an expert
3 witness’s qualifications or knowledge generally go to the weight of the witness’s
4 testimony, not its admissibility,” Abarca, 761 F. Supp. 2d at 1028 (quoting
5 Robinson, 447 F.3d at 1100).

6 Mr. Ellison has extensive education, experience and knowledge in the area he
7 is expected to testify which is the field of forensic engineering as it “relates to
8 textiles and fabrics, the thermal transfer characteristics of those materials when
9 exposed to fire, and the impact on human skin as a result of that thermal transfer.”
10 (See Dkt. No. 164 at 6.) The Court concludes Mr. Ellison meets the broad
11 definition of a qualified expert under Rule 702. Any concerns Defendants have
12 concerning his qualifications can be raised on cross-examination. The Court
13 DENIES Plaintiff’s motion to exclude the expert testimony of Andrew Ellison as
14 unqualified.

15 **G. Cumulative or Duplicative**

16 In Defendants’ motions to exclude testimonies of Dr. Hall, Dr. Xu, and Dr.
17 Brones, they contend that the testimonies of Dr. Hall, Dr. Xu, Dr. Brones and Mr.
18 Ellison are duplicative and cumulative, a waste of the jury’s and the Court’s time.
19 According to Defendants, Dr. Xu and Dr. Hall have been retained to testify about
20 fiber identification and flammability. Mr. Ellison was retained to opine as to
21 flammability and human burn injuries and Dr. Brones, a plastic surgeon, will testify
22 _____

23 FOOTNOTE CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

24 states he specializes in human burn injuries while his later CV dated September 2016, when
25 Ellison was already designated as an expert in this case, has no mention that he specializes in
26 human burn injuries. (Dkt. No. 156-5, Irving Decl., Ex. 4, Ellison Depo. at 22:9-24:12.)
27 Defendants’ supporting documents do not support their argument. However, in opposition,
28 Plaintiff provides Mr. Ellison’s prior CVs from August 2008 and August 2010 which do not
reference his expertise in human skin burns; however, the removal of that area of expertise was
due to a change in employment and not based on his training education and experience over the
past years in the area of human skin burns. (Id. at 24:9-12.)

1 about materials identification and flammability characteristics of fabrics. All will
2 opine that the Shirt was made from blended fabrics and consequently, more
3 flammable than 100% cotton. They also argue their testimonies would be unduly
4 prejudicial because the jury may lend more credibility to the expert's opinion if
5 multiple experts testify similarly.

6 In response, Plaintiff argues that each expert witness will offer opinions
7 based on facts and data customarily relied upon in his own specialized field of
8 discipline. According to Plaintiff, the experts contribute specialized knowledge
9 from unique scientific perspective that, taken together, will ensure the jury's
10 decision is based on a thorough understanding of these complex and multi-faceted
11 issues. For example, Dr. Xu's testimony about materials engineering principles will
12 assist the jury in understanding how fibers can be identified by molecular structure
13 and address the results of his optical microscopy study of the Shirt as well as his use
14 of the FTIR method while Dr. Hall will address fiber identification by morphology
15 and discuss his SEM testing. Dr. Brones' opinion is narrow and offered "only for
16 the purpose of explaining the nature and extent of Plaintiff's injuries and his
17 opinions regarding Plaintiff's subsequent treatment." (Dkt. No. 165 at 9.) Lastly,
18 Dr. Ellison does not identify the fiber blend but offers a fire scientist's perspective
19 on how the blend of nylon, cotton and rayon increases the severity of the injuries
20 compared to a 100% cotton.

21 Even if an expert is qualified under Rule 702, a court has broad discretion to
22 exclude the testimony under Rule 403 if its probative value is substantially
23 outweighed by the danger of unfair prejudice, confusion of the issues, misleading
24 the jury, or needless presentation of cumulative evidence. Fed. R. Evid. 403;
25 Rogers v. Raymark Indus., Inc., 922 F.2d 1426, 1430 (9th Cir. 1991). "Rule 403's
26 cumulative evidence provision does not prohibit the introduction of cumulative
27 evidence; rather, it merely permits courts to exclude cumulative evidence when it
28 has little incremental value." United States v. Miguel, 87 Fed. App'x 67, 68 (9th

1 Cir. Jan. 30, 2004).

2 In this case, Dr. Brones will be testifying concerning Plaintiff's injuries and
3 opinions about Plaintiff's future treatments. His testimony concerning the general
4 statement that the Shirt was made of blended materials may overlap but is not
5 needlessly cumulative. Mr. Ellison will be testifying about flammability and
6 burning behavior of different textiles and human burn injuries which are distinct
7 from the topics of the other experts. While Dr. Xu and Dr. Hall reached the same
8 conclusion that the Shirt contained 90% cotton, 4-5% nylon and 5-6% rayon, their
9 methodologies and analyses in determining the fiber content of the Shirt differ.
10 Interestingly, despite Defendants' argument concerning cumulative evidence, the
11 Court notes that Defendants' expert, Dr. Howitt, will be relying on the testing
12 performed by three different laboratories to determine the Shirt's composition using
13 different methods of fiber identification. Moreover, since both parties will be
14 relying on testing of the Shirt's composition by different methods, the Court
15 concludes that Defendants' argument that they will be unduly prejudiced is without
16 merit. The Court DENIES without prejudice Defendants' motion to exclude the
17 testimonies of Dr. Hall, Dr. Xu, Dr. Brones and Mr. Ellison as cumulative.
18 Defendants may object at trial on any available ground under the Federal Rules of
19 Evidence.

20 **H. Evidentiary Objections**

21 Plaintiff filed objections to the declaration of Dr. David Howitt. (Dkt. No.
22 178-14.) The objections mirror the arguments raised in the Daubert motion
23 concerning his qualifications and the testing he performed. As discussed and
24 concluded above, the Court denied Plaintiff's motion to exclude the testimony of
25 Dr. Howitt based on his qualifications and the testing he performed. Any
26 challenges to Dr. Howitt's statements may be raised at trial. Therefore, the Court
27 **OVERRULES** the evidentiary objections filed by Plaintiff.

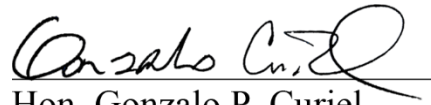
28 ////

1 **Conclusion**

2 Based on the reasoning above, the Court TENTATIVELY GRANTS in part
3 and DENIES in part Plaintiff's motion to exclude the expert testimony of Dr. David
4 Howitt. The Court also TENTATIVELY GRANTS in part and DENIES in part
5 Defendants' motion to exclude the expert testimonies of Dr. David Hall, and Dr.
6 Michel Brones. The Court further TENTATIVELY DENIES Defendants' motions
7 to exclude the expert testimonies of Dr. David Xu and Andrew Ellison. As to
8 Defendants' motion to exclude the expert testimony of Dr. Schwartzman, the Court
9 will hear the parties' argument at the hearing. Counsel are advised that the Court's
10 rulings are tentative and the Court will entertain additional arguments at the hearing
11 on **November 17, 2017 at 1:30 p.m.** in Courtroom 2D.

12 IT IS SO ORDERED.

13 DATED: NOVEMBER 16, 2017

14 
15 Hon. Gonzalo P. Curiel
16 United States District Judge
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